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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard
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"Saying it like it is!"

Okay, so even though I can look out the window and see dark clouds on the horizon, and know that it's cold and damp outside, I have finally proclaimed that Spring has sprung!

How can I make such an affirmation? Easy, I embarked on my season debut of golf this week! And, at the gun range, I used one of the outdoor ranges and my hands were not numb with cold!

And to top this seasonal proclamation off, I dusted off the barbecue and had a nice barbecued steak the other night! Doesn't get any better than that!

So, how was the golfing? I can't complain, and I had plenty of excuses all thought up to help me explain my possible poor play. But, I didn't need them. Sure, I made some poor shots, but I made quite a lot of good ones. This early in the season, I was content with my overall play. No, I'm not ready to take on Tiger just yet! And, I'm hoping that I'll be getting back to the course as a member of the staff within the next week or so. The course was in better shape than I had anticipated, so that's a good sign of how well we maintained it last season.

I was going to continue my rant on spam this week, but I think you get the picture. It's just amazing that so much "crap" makes its way into our e-mail boxes on a daily basis. I really see no point to it all, but I guess I'm not supposed to understand the rationale behind a lot of this stuff. As some spam machines get shut down, more pop up to take their place. Maybe some day, we won't be inconvenienced with this garbage.

Well, enjoy your springtime rituals, as well as just being able to enjoy the weather as it continues to improve. I'll be cleaning up the yard of last year's leaves, and getting the lawn ready. Pretty soon I'll get ready for planting and getting the gardens in shape. Looking forward to these and other things every Spring - it's a great time of the year!

Until next time...

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Another beta of Taskbar is available on <http://atari.nvg.org/Taskbar/>.
Some new features and a lot of work done cleaning up and refactoring
the code.

--

/*
** Jo Even Skarstein <http://joska.nvg.org/>
*/

=~==~==

PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone, and we
find ourselves facing springtime. Ahhh, for the gentle warm breezes and
the scent of things growing again after their enforced term of
dormancy. It won't be long until we're all out in our yards cleaning up
and mowing the lawn.

On another note, I'd like to thank the couple of you who emailed me
about last week's column and my rant about the current state of our
education system. I would like to make a comment about that though. I
wasn't ranting so much about the state of the education system as I was
about our SOCIAL system. To paraphrase President Clinton, there's
nothing wrong with our education system that cannot be cured by fixing
what's wrong with our social system. Parents have abdicated some of
their responsibilities and that's a big part of why our education
system is the way it is. To fix one, we must fix the other.

Okay, on to another subject. But what to talk about? Politics? Nah.
You've got your own opinions, and they're just as valid as mine.
Religion? No way! I'm not getting involved in that one.

So what does that leave? Microsoft's new version of Windows, Vista? I
don't think so. I've played with a couple of beta releases of it, and
formed my opinion early, but I'm really not familiar enough with the
finished product to have an opinion that I feel comfortable with making
public.

Oh well. Let's get right to the news and stuff from the UseNet, okay?
Yeah, that sounds like a plan.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Philippe Cousson asks about files from an ST-formatted disk to a PC:

"How do I get files, mainly text, from diskettes first used on an Atari

ST, for use on a Windows PC?"

Malcolm Dew-Jones tells Philippe:

"I think the easiest would be to format a new disk on the PC, as mentioned elsewhere, and then use the Atari to copy the files to the new disk. I think you have to copy one file at a time because a full atari disk to disk copy will overwrite the bits required by the PC, and the PC won't read it after that.

However, as alternative I recall that you can read the disks on a PC by using linux.

You can get various very small distributions of linux (i.e. 3-4 diskettes only) that install and run "on top of" DOS/Windows using the existing dos file system. Unzip the linux distro into a directory, run linux-start.bat (or whatever it's called), and it boots into linux using your dos/windows file system. Now mount the atari diskette and copy the contents into a directory. Now reboot and you're back to dos/windows, and the atari files will be there on your hard disk where you put them.

In the past I have used "mini-linux", but that was long long ago. There are much more up to date distros of linux designed to be started from dos/windows. You would need to google for them yourself, I don't know what they are."

Peter West adds:

"There is a simpler solution if you still have the Atari, and the diskettes are standard 80 tracks and 9 sectors/track: There is a PD program called DISKMOD.TOS (7187 bytes) that needs BLOCK0.DAT (512 bytes) in the same directory. If you put the old Atari disk in the drive (with write-protection off) and then run DISKMOD.TOS, it writes a new IBM-style boot sector (from BLOCK0.DAT) to the disk *without affecting anything else on the disk*. You can then run the disk on the PC.

I suggest for the first disk or two you make a back-up first on the Atari, but I have never known it to fail (although there may be problems with 'skewed' formats, but the older Ataris did not produce that).

If you have problems locating the programs, send me your email address and I'll forward them to you."

Adam Brannon adds his thoughts:

"For the best compatibility, make sure you are using Rainbow TOS (TOS 1.4) and at least a DSDD 720K drive, like the 314. TOS 1.2 will do PC compatible disks but had a few glitches. With Rainbow TOS, you can format the disk in the Atari and directly read it in the PC. I have transferred many files between the PC and the Atari this way with no problems."

Guillaume Tello provides one caution:

"But be careful with the disk format: if you use DD floppies, no problem on both machines. But if you format a HD disk on the Atari in 720k, most PC will detect the high density and expect a 1.44 disk! So you have to fill the HD hole on the disk to make it act like a DD."

'MikeFaz' asks an easy one about copying files:

"I'm having a memory blank. I can't seem to remember how to copy files from a floppy to my hard drive in my ST!"

Adam Brannon tells Mike:

"Open the floppy folder and drag the file over the hard drive icon and drop. You can select more than one. If you want the files in a certain folder on the HDD, make sure the HDD folder is open to where you want the file and drag it from the floppy. Works pretty much like Windows."

Peter Slegg asks for help with using KeyEdit to change the characters on his keyboard:

"I copied the british.tbl to the folder C:\MINT\1-16-CUR\ and renamed it KEYBOATD.TBL

I've done this before but it had no effect on the keyboard layout. I then edited it to re-arrange the 2 keys that are wrong # and '. Saved it and rebooted but it made no difference. I don't think this is a problem with keyedit."

Francois Le Coat tells Peter:

"In this case, I'd guess you've installed another utility that overrides the freeMiNT keyboard mapping. This was the case when I was using the keyboard mapping utility included in Clocky. Clocky mapping required to be disabled so that MiNT "keyboard.tbl" was effective.

You may be using other keyboard utilities such as Clocky, CKBD etc. that makes freeMiNT keyboard mapping ineffective."

Peter replies:

"No there is nothing like that, at least not that I am aware of. Would clocky show up in ps -A ?

PID	PPID	PRI	CURPRI	STATUS	SIZE	TIME	COMMAND
000	000	0	0	Wait	172032	02:59.95	MiNT
001	000	0	0	Wait	98304	00:00.15	init
002	000	5	5	Sleep	172032	00:00.00	sld
003	000	0	0	Sleep	172032	00:00.05	update
004	000	0	0	TSR	122880	00:00.15	fpu__2m
019	000	0	0	Wait	466944	00:00.17	gluestik
020	000	0	0	TSR	65536	00:00.08	LDG
021	000	0	0	TSR	16384	00:00.05	MACCEL3
062	000	0	0	Sleep	245760	00:00.15	syslogd
091	001	0	0	Wait	16384	00:01.09	aes

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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New Xbox 360 Controller May Poach Nintendo's Wii Market

What would it be like if you could combine the best of an Xbox 360 and the best of the Nintendo Wii? Gamers may soon find out if the latest rumors are true.

Citing anonymous sources, MTV News reported Microsoft will soon launch a Wii controller clone for the Xbox 360. It's part of a reported strategy to cash in on Nintendo's market differentiation.

"[Microsoft] marketing just want it so they can match the Wii point for point," MTV's source said. "The biggest parts of their marketing materials outline how easy it would be for third parties to port their Wii games to the 360."

According to MTV, the controller isn't much different in functionality or design from Nintendo's Wii remote, but comes with four face buttons, an analog stick and a microphone. There are also plans for the controller to interact with the Xbox Live Vision Camera, the source said.

In addition to designing the interface for the controller, Rare, the Microsoft-owned studio that developed Perfect Dark Zero, has also fleshed out Microsoft's take on Nintendo's Mii avatars, the source said.

Microsoft's Miis are designed to be associated with any game that incorporates the controller and create a standard look for the games. The avatars aren't tied to a controller when in use, as Xbox Live profiles currently are, MTV reported. Microsoft is reportedly hoping to release the controller before the end of the year, despite development delays.

Yankee Group analyst Mike Goodman said a Wii-like controller seems like a good idea for Microsoft. To Nintendo's credit, he said, the Japanese firm identified a market need and exploited it. The Wii controller is indeed Nintendo's differentiator, making it easier for a novice or a nongamer to play games, Goodman said.

"If Microsoft develops a controller like this, it will test a couple of theories," he said. "Microsoft has done a good job in positioning itself for casual gamers. In some ways Microsoft has a better lineup for casual gamers than Wii does. Theoretically, the drawback has always been the input device. You've had to use the traditional game controller. It will be interesting to see, if Microsoft does roll out this controller, if it improves the value proposition for the casual market."

For the core market, the Wii remote controller does not work as well as the traditional game pad, Goodman said. Nintendo's Wii has done well with games like Wii Sports, but has not performed as well with traditional games like Madden and other third-party titles.

"This controller would be giving consumers an option for what they want to use," Goodman said. "But it sets up an interesting proposition for developers, because now the question becomes which input device do you develop for?"

Video Game Review: You Can't Tilt This

Purists who play the silver ball might say pinball should be enjoyed on full-sized machines, but few of us have the money or den space to house an arcade-size collection.

"Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection" (Crave Entertainment, for the Wii, PlayStation 2 and PSP, \$29.99) brings nine pinball tables back from the 1970s, 80s and 90s and faithfully recreates their look, feel and physics.

A little Bon Jovi on the stereo and a Sun & Sand Yankee Candle burning in the background, and I find myself back at the Jersey Shore dropping quarter after quarter at a boardwalk arcade.

"Pinball Hall of Fame" features a virtual arcade, letting players browse the tables before settling in to play.

The oldest and simplest of the collection is "Jive Time" (1970), a basic table with a bit too much space between the flippers and five upper bumpers surrounding one of two spin holes. Sink a ball into the holes to activate a bonus spin wheel on the backglass.

"Gorgar" (1979), a fantasy-themed title enhanced by elaborate artwork, was the first talking pinball game, although the devil-like character's vocabulary is somewhat limited. Hit the ball into the snake pit and Gorgar keeps it and says, "Me got you."

The looping tracks of "Taxi" (1988) make for a hectic ride, but the table sports an interesting spinout ramp for plunger shots that awards up to 100,000 points with just the right touch. Your mission is to pick up patrons and get them to their location, and the odd cast of characters consists of a redhead named Lola, a robot called Pinbot, Mikhail Gorbachev, Dracula and Santa Claus.

The extremely fast-paced "Funhouse" (1990) is perhaps the collection's most enjoyable title.

It's chock full of ramps, trap doors, wind tunnels and mystery mirrors, and its centerpiece is an annoying talking doll head named Rudy. Your mission is to put Rudy to sleep (thus shutting him up) by advancing the clock to midnight. Do so, and you'll get a chance to add millions to your score.

Other interesting titles include "Whirlwind" (1990), which places three spinning twister wheels in the middle of the table to mess with the ball's natural fall, and "Space Shuttle" (1984), in which players take on multi-ball missions atop a table decorated with a replica of the spaceship.

The Wii version of "Pinball Hall of Fame" taps into the console's motion

control capabilities just enough to add to the authenticity.

Triggers on the left hand nunchuk and right hand remote activate the flippers, and each control can be jerked a little to nudge the table (nudge too much and you'll tilt). Pulling back on the nunchuk stick pulls back the plunger.

I may never have reached "wizard" status, but I've played enough pinball over the years to recognize that "Pinball Hall of Fame" is well worth the bargain price. And it fits a lot better in my rec room than nine standup tables.

Three out of four stars.

Japan Develops Brain and Eye Pills for Gaming Fans

Gaming addicts with sore eyes and tired brains may be able to perk up with "Game Suppli," a new Japanese supplement developed specifically for the country's thousands of fanatic players.

"We concentrated on developing a supplement for those who love games," reads the advert for the pills on www.cybergadget.co.jp, a Web site that sells a range of accessories for video game fans.

Maker Kyowa-Yakuhin produces two different supplements for the "Game Suppli" range: blueberry tablets that are meant to be good for the eyes, and transparent capsules containing Docosahexaenoic acid, or DHA, a fatty acid that supposedly enhances concentration.

Japan's convenience stores are stacked with drinks and capsules claiming various health and beauty benefits, sometimes without any scientific evidence.

Horror Writer King Blasts Banning Violent Videogames

Horror writer Stephen King has criticized plans by a U.S. state to ban violent video games, saying such a move would be undemocratic and it was up to parents to monitor their children's entertainment.

King, in a pop culture column he writes for Entertainment Weekly, said he was no videogame fan but was outraged when he heard that a bill in the state of Massachusetts could ban the sale of violent games to anyone aged under 18.

"What makes me crazy is when politicians take it upon themselves to play surrogate parents. The results of that are usually disastrous. Not to mention undemocratic," wrote King.

The move comes amid an ongoing debate in the United States, Britain and Australia about banning violent games. British and Irish authorities last year banning videogame "Manhunt 2" in which an insane asylum escapee goes on a killing spree.

The jury remains out on whether violent videogames lead to violent

behavior.

King, whose stories such as "The Shining" and "Carrie" have been made into Hollywood horror movies, said it seemed to him that the games only reflected a violence that already existed in the society.

"What really makes me insane is how eager politicians are to use the pop culture as a whipping boy. It's easy for them, even sort of fun, because the pop-cult always hollers nice and loud. Also, it allows legislators to ignore the elephants in the living room," he said.

He pointed out that there already was a rating system for videogames and banning them was pointless because if the youngsters wanted to get hold of them, they would find ways.

King argued that the growing divide in between the haves and the have-nots in the United States and the country's gun laws contributed more to violent behavior than computer games.

He said it was too easy for critics to claim - falsely as it turned out - the Virginia Tech killer Cho Seung-Hui was a fan of shooting game "Counter-Strike."

"If he'd been stuck with nothing but a plastic videogame gun, he wouldn't even have been able to kill himself," wrote King.

The author said the most effective bar was parents knowing and caring about what their children were watching and reading, what they were doing and who they were hanging out with.

"Parents need to have the guts to forbid material they find objectionable ... and then explain why it's being forbidden," he said.

"They also need to monitor their children's lives in the pop culture - which means a lot more than seeing what games they're renting down the street."

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Yahoo Wants Better Deal from Microsoft

Internet icon Yahoo Inc., under pressure of a three-week deadline from Microsoft to accept its \$41 billion buyout bid, said Monday it doesn't oppose a deal with the world's largest software maker but wants a better offer.

The statement comes after Microsoft warned Saturday that if a deal isn't reached by April 26 it will launch a hostile takeover at a less attractive price.

In early trading Monday, Yahoo shares fell 49 cents, or 1.7 percent, to \$27.87, while Microsoft's stock added 23 cents, or less than 1 percent, to \$29.39.

In Yahoo's lengthiest statement about the bid to date, Chief Executive Jerry Yang and Chairman Roy Bostock wrote in a letter to Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer that the current offer is "not in the best interests of shareholders" of Yahoo.

"We are not opposed to a transaction with Microsoft if it is in the best interests of our stockholders," Yang and Bostock said in the letter. "Our position is simply that any transaction must be at a value that fully reflects the value of Yahoo, including any strategic benefits to Microsoft, and on terms that provide certainty to our stockholders."

Microsoft's offer for Yahoo, made public on Feb. 1, would create a stronger rival to Google Inc., which dominates the online search advertising market.

At the time, the cash-and-stock bid was valued at \$44.6 billion, or 62 percent above Yahoo's market value. As of Friday, the deal was worth just under \$41 billion.

Yahoo's board formally rejected Microsoft Corp.'s bid on Feb. 11, saying it undervalues the company.

In Monday's letter, Yang and Bostock said Microsoft's threat to go hostile is "counterproductive and inconsistent with your stated objective of a friendly transaction."

The Yahoo leaders also dinged Microsoft for implying that the two companies hadn't discussed the deal since February. Yang and Bostock said the two companies "have had constructive conversations together regarding a variety of topics, including integration and regulatory issues."

"Moreover, Steve, you personally attended two of these meetings and could have advanced discussions in any way you saw fit," they wrote.

Yang and Bostock also said they are waiting for Microsoft to provide information that would help them understand regulatory issues that could arise from a deal. They said they did so on March 28 after a joint meeting of legal advisers.

Joele Frank of the public relations firm Microsoft has hired to advise on the Yahoo deal, said early Monday that Microsoft had no immediate response to the Yahoo statement beyond the "explicit" letter Ballmer sent to Yahoo's board on Saturday.

"If we are forced to take an offer directly to your shareholders, that action will have an undesirable impact on the value of your company from our perspective which will be reflected in the terms of our proposal," Ballmer wrote.

Since initially rejecting Microsoft's bid, Yahoo has explored alliances with Google Inc., News Corp.'s MySpace.com and Time Warner Inc.'s AOL, but no alternative to Microsoft's offer has surfaced.

Ballmer acknowledged the alternative negotiations and questioned why, in the absence of another offer, Yahoo was still dragging its heels.

"This is despite the fact that our proposal is the only alternative put forward that offers your shareholders full and fair value for their shares," Ballmer wrote in the letter. Ballmer said the Microsoft offer has grown stronger as the economic climate has weakened, and that Yahoo's shareholders agreed.

Yang and Bostock rebutted Ballmer's claim that most Yahoo shareholders support a deal, writing, "stockholders representing a significant portion of our outstanding shares have indicated to us that your proposal substantially undervalues Yahoo."

The company recently released a forecast that calls for its revenue to rise more than 70 percent over the next three years. In their letter, Yang and Bostock said Yahoo's business has been marching forward. They pointed to an announcement made earlier Monday, in which Yahoo released more details about its effort to become a one-stop shop for selling and distributing online display ads - the Internet's equivalent of billboards.

The upgrade, called Amp, won't be available until this summer, and then only on a limited basis among more than 600 newspaper publishers trying to recover some of the revenue that the Internet has siphoned from their print editions.

Yahoo said Amp will make it easier for advertisers to aim their messages at specific demographic groups across scores of Web sites. Amp will rely heavily on data that Yahoo collects about people's preferences at its own Web site as well as other online destinations.

Yahoo's new platform will be competing against similar technology recently acquired by Google and Microsoft. Google bought DoubleClick Inc. for \$3.2 billion primarily so it would have a better vehicle for selling display ads. The same objective drove Microsoft's \$6 billion purchase of aQuantive.

Yahoo, Time Warner in AOL Talks

Yahoo is in talks with Time Warner on a deal to combine Internet operations with AOL, while News Corp. is in talks with Microsoft to jointly bid for Yahoo, the Wall Street Journal reported Wednesday.

The possible deal between Yahoo and AOL is a bid to thwart Microsoft's bid for Yahoo. Yahoo plans to present shareholders with a three-fold plan to move forward without Microsoft. The Yahoo plan would also include a multi-billion dollar stock repurchase as well as an advertising tie-up with Google, the report said.

A Yahoo-AOL deal would involve Time Warner folding AOL into Yahoo and making a cash investment in return for about 20 percent of the combined company, the Wall Street Journal said. The deal would be valued at around US\$10 billion, and would not include AOL's dial-up Internet access business. Yahoo would use cash from the Time Warner deal to buy back several billions of dollars worth of its own stock.

Time Warner is under pressure to find a strategy for AOL because it has lost a lot of value since their merger in 2000, the report says.

There is still a lot of work to do before a deal is reached, the paper reported.

Microsoft has already offered Yahoo shareholders a combined cash and stock deal valued at \$42 billion, and has stated several times that it will not raise its bid.

The Wall Street Journal reported, however, that News Corp. may join Microsoft in the bid for Yahoo, although the newspaper did not say how much the offer might increase nor how the two companies would split ownership of Yahoo.

HP Unveils Small Laptop for Schoolkids

One more of the world's biggest technology companies is clamoring to enter the growing market for pint-sized computers targeted mainly for pint-sized customers. Hewlett-Packard Co., the No. 1 seller of personal computers worldwide, said Tuesday it's throwing its weight behind a new class of miniaturized laptops, a fledgling market already populated with products from Intel Corp., the world's largest semiconductor company, and Asustek Computers Inc., the world's largest maker of computer motherboards.

The machines are so new the industry hasn't settled on a name for low-cost and scaled-down laptops used primarily for surfing the Internet and performing other basic functions like word processing.

Intel has labeled them "netbooks," and it expects more than 50 million netbooks to be in circulation by 2011.

HP executives say their new machines, which go on sale later this month, are an important piece of the Palo Alto-based company's effort to build market share in schools, where machines had to be smaller and cheaper without losing too many functions.

The companies also expect adults to cotton to the idea of buying two laptops - a lightweight one just for Web browsing on the go and the full-power machine for the home or office. But industry executives acknowledge that the market is untested and that no one knows what demand will be once the machines are deployed widely.

HP's foray comes in the form of a new computer called a "Mini-Note" that weighs less than 3 pounds with a screen that measures 8.9 inches diagonally. The machines start at under \$500 for a Linux-based model. Prices go up for Windows Vista models with faster processors.

The processors HP is using are made by Via Technologies Inc., the distant third-ranked player in the microprocessor space, and come in clock speeds up to 1.6 gigahertz. The inclusion is a big win for Via, which trails Intel and Advanced Micro Devices Inc. by a wide margin in the microprocessor market.

HP executives say the only major feature its Mini-Note lacks is an optical drive for ingesting DVDs and CD-ROMs, which can be bought separately. But they say many schools requested the drives be left out to prevent students from playing unauthorized games.

The Mini-Note will compete primarily with Intel's Classmate PCs - which

are designed by Intel and feature Intel chips but are built and branded by other companies - and Asustek's Eee PC.

To a lesser extent, they also will go up against the XO laptop from the Cambridge, Mass., nonprofit One Laptop per Child, which is intended primarily for schoolchildren in developing countries.

Intel says it has sold "tens of thousands" of Classmate PCs since they went on sale last year. And OLPC says it has sold hundreds of thousands of the XO. Figures were not immediately available for sales of the Eee.

Are Bloggers an At-Risk Population?

While political blogs like the Daily Kos get most of the attention from the media, the New York Times cast a spotlight on the world of technology blogging with a recent article entitled, "In Web World of 24/7 Stress, Writers Blog Till They Drop."

The article focused on the recent death of Russell Shaw, a prolific tech blogger who wrote for ZDNet, TMCNet, Weblogs Inc., the PodTech Network, Corante, AllBusiness.com and the Huffington Post. Shaw also wrote books on media downloading and wireless networking.

Shaw suffered a heart attack while in San Jose to cover a tech conference. His last e-mail to his ZDNet editor displayed a never-say-die work ethic: "Have come down with something. Resting now, posts to resume later today or tomorrow."

In December 2007, Marc Orchant, who had recently left ZDNet to cofound a now-defunct site called BlogNation, died of a massive coronary while working in his home office. And later that month, Om Malik, who left a reporting gig at Business 2.0 to start his own blog site, GigaOm, survived a heart attack.

To the New York Times, these events signaled something ominous - a "digital sweatshop" where professional writers - the kind who, in another age, would have union jobs on newspapers or magazines - are toiling away, always trying to win one more page view, earn one more scoop, not so much for the importance of what they have to say, but to earn enough money to support their families.

Reporter Matt Richtel quotes Michael Arrington of TechCrunch bemoaning the always-on lifestyle of an A+-list blogger. Arrington says he has gained 30 pounds since starting his blog, developed a severe sleeping disorder, and turned his home into a full-time office. "At some point, I'll have a nervous breakdown and be admitted to the hospital, or something else will happen. This is not sustainable," he said.

"There's no time ever - including when you're sleeping - when you're not worried about missing a story," Arrington told the Times. "Wouldn't it be great if we said no blogger or journalist could write a story between 8 p.m. Pacific time and dawn? Then we could all take a break. But that's never going to happen."

Arrington may be on the same road that Om Malik was traveling when he was stopped by a heart attack. Last week, Malik took stock of his life three months after being hospitalized. As a first-time entrepreneur

with bills - and a team of reporters - to pay, he "second-guess(ed) every decision not made by myself and was obsessed with minutiae," he wrote on GigaOm.

"Three months on, having seen the Giga Gang at work, I realized what a mistake that was. You empower people, and in turn they power you to do good things. Now I am finding more time to focus on writing, reporting and spending time on projects," he wrote.

The at-risk population likely includes not just bloggers, but many others in the Silicon Valley information economy. "Many of us in Silicon Valley refuse to acknowledge that we live a high-stress existence and are prone to all sorts of problems that stem from an 18-hour-a-day, non-stop lifestyle," he said.

Another technology blogger, Mitch Radcliffe, said that Arrington and others' breathless desire to deliver scoops - even of extremely narrow interests - shows that such bloggers are taking journalism's worst impulse (as depicted in the screwball comedy *His Girl Friday*) and exacerbating it.

"What the story does is demonstrate that the race for a 'scoop' keeps people at the edge of their energies and good judgment," Radcliff said. "Journalism's worst feature, the desire to be first with a story, rather than providing thoughtful and complete reporting so that the reader can make up their own mind, has become the *raison d'être* for blogging. It drives volume in postings, but not necessarily good reporting."

Online Crime's Impact Spreads

There appears to be no end to the cybercrime wave despite daily headlines about the latest computer breach and the best efforts of hundreds of security companies.

The latest estimate: \$200 billion a year, rivaling the illicit markets for drug trafficking and money laundering, says Mikko Hypponen, chief research officer at computer-security firm F-Secure.

Hypponen was among scores of computer-security experts here this week to discuss how data theft and Internet-enabled financial fraud have evolved into a global enterprise as sophisticated and responsive to economic principles as any other industry.

"International crime 10 years ago was drugs and money laundering," says Hypponen. Yet, Interpol, the international crime-fighting organization, has only a 65 million euro annual budget (about \$102 million) to fight crime, he says.

The onslaught of cybercrime has had wide-ranging impact, based on the topics of panels, reports and surveys released during the conference.

* In online we don't trust. The hazards of surfing and shopping online have shaken consumer confidence in e-commerce.

Nearly 60% of Americans are fearful someone will steal their account passwords when they bank online, and 38% do not trust making payments

online, according to a survey of 1,000 U.S. adults conducted by TNS Sofres on behalf of digital-security company Gemalto.

* Banking threats. Consumers are warranted in their fears. Bank accounts were the most commonly advertised item for sale on underground computer servers, accounting for 22% of all items in the last six months of 2007, according to a Symantec report this week.

Several analysts, including John Pescatore of Gartner, point to the escalating threat of bots, sprawling networks of compromised PCs controlled by criminal groups. Bot nets are increasingly spreading at financial institutions. The top bot nets send a staggering 100 billion spam e-mail messages each day, SecureWorks says.

* Malware ads. Speaking of spam and other forms of malicious software code, hackers are using YouTube videos to advertise their goods.

In one post, a group from Albania offers to illegally break into corporate networks to steal data and implant malware, says Don Jackson, director of threat intelligence at SecureWorks.

People Uneasy With Web Sites Using Personal Details

Many people are uncomfortable with Web sites customizing content to people's personal profiles, according to a new survey.

"There's a creepy factor and a fear of the unknown that people don't want to deal with," said Michelle Warren, senior research analyst at Info-Tech Research Group in London, Ontario.

"The notion that there's a privacy issue in someone's email account hits a little too close to home for some," she added.

Nearly 60 percent of 2,513 people in the United States questioned in a Harris Interactive poll said they were uneasy when Web sites use information about personal online activity to tailor advertisements or content.

The findings may pave the way for web giants to offer users more tangible benefits in exchange for lost privacy, such as discounts on movies, music and electronics, said Dr. Alan Westin, of Columbia University in New York, who helped to design the poll.

"Free search engines or social networking sites are encoded on web user's DNA, and one way to defend behavioral marketing is to sweeten its benefits to users," Westin said in an interview.

While privacy boundaries aren't forcing web users to boycott popular Web applications just yet, that may change as users begin to understand the extent to which their personal details are being used.

"What happens is people suddenly realize they've put out enough personal information to get served with a targeted advertisement, and the Web makes the transition from convenience to creepiness," said Colin McKay, of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada in Ottawa.

The survey showed that younger users are more comfortable with the

customized web content, with people aged 18-43 leading the pack.

As a whole, web users' comfort was increased only slightly when asked to consider potential safeguards that would improve web privacy policies and procedures.

MIT Researcher 'Paints' Cyber Threats

Cyber threats like NetSky, Mydoom and Parite are the bane of IT departments around the globe, but artist Alex Dragulescu has found subtle beauty deep within the dangerous computer code that can bring down networks and bombard e-mail inboxes with murderous spam.

Dragulescu has peeled back the code behind the world's worst tech bugs and rendered stunning images from it. The Romanian-born MIT researcher and artist was commissioned to do fashion the artwork by MessageLabs, a computer security company that sought to put a face - or at least a shape - on computer viruses.

Dragulescu found interesting, recurring patterns. He used the data to coax pointy green tentacles from the dreaded 'Mydoom' e-mail worm and grew pretty peach petals from the epicenter of the 'Degreediploma5' spam file.

"I think there is beauty in their complexity," Dragulescu said at a gallery debut of his work in San Francisco. "These types of threats are very smart. Very intelligent in design. Digital organisms, really, that adapt themselves and replicate. We wanted to capture some of that complexity and uniqueness."

The process of creating the art was like none other. MessageLabs carefully sent Dragulescu the once-harmful files after modifying them so his computers would not contract the viruses.

Dragulescu looked for the frequency of certain occurrences in a virus, such as particular network sockets that it was designed to compromise. He fed the resulting data into a program he created with an algorithm to grow the viruses and Trojans visually.

"The number of occurrences would determine how branching develops. Another example would be how curly the tentacles get," Dragulescu said.

Dragulescu's next project will be creating abstract portraits of people based on the contents of their blogs and the types of online communities they inhabit.

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